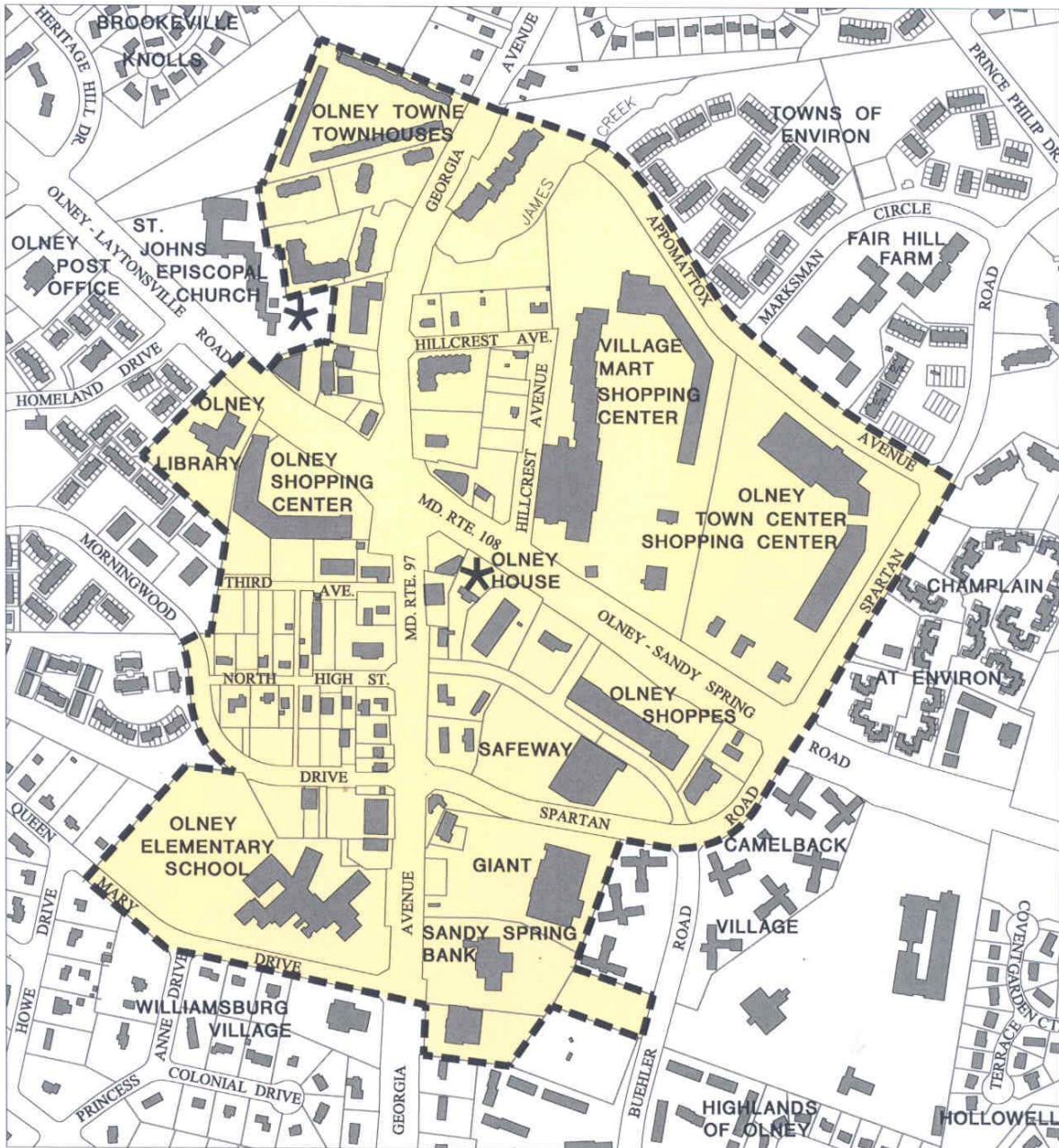




# Town Center Context



-  HISTORIC SITES
-  OLNEY TOWN CENTER BOUNDARY



0 600'

# TOWN CENTER PLAN

## **Goals:**

*Create an economically healthy, attractive, pedestrian-oriented, and well connected Town Center to be the commercial and civic heart of the community. Create a civic center in the Town Center through redevelopment of a major shopping center or a public-private partnership.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Olney Town Center is the commercial area around the intersection of Georgia Avenue and MD 108. It covers approximately 90 acres and contains some 150 stores and other commercial establishments in more than 820,000 square feet of commercial space, approximately 550,000 square feet of it retail. Georgia Avenue and MD 108 intersect and divide the Town Center into four quadrants, which include four strip shopping centers—the two largest ones in the Northeast Quadrant—and numerous other businesses. The neighborhoods around the Town Center consist of townhouses, garden apartments and single-family houses.

The Town Center is located in the Upper Rock Creek (North Branch) and the Hawlings River watersheds. Both the Hawlings River and the North Branch of Rock Creek are sensitive watersheds, and the area around the Town Center is designated for several actions to improve water quality through watershed restoration action plans prepared by the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (see Environmental Resources Chapter).

## **MAJOR ISSUES**

Although the Town Center has been successful in adhering to the Master Plan policies and preventing the spread of commercial strips along major roads, it is presently a suburban crossroads with a collection of strip shopping centers and individual stores. It is not pedestrian-oriented and it lacks easy and convenient connections among the different shopping centers. Long distances between shopping centers, created partly by large parking lots, and the lack of safe and pleasant walkways make pedestrian circulation in the Town Center challenging.

The Olney community has been exploring the possibility of a civic center in Olney where multiple public facilities could be sited in one location. In 2000, the Olney Community Center Task Force, a joint effort by the Greater Olney Civic Association and the Olney Chamber of Commerce, requested the County not only to expand and renovate the current library space but to “address the long standing problem of trying to locate a permanent home for a number of other County services such as the Olney Police satellite office and the Olney satellite office of the Mid-County Regional Services Center.” The goal was to have a place where a variety of County services can be located jointly in one location in Town Center.

The Town Center lacks a major open space, a place for the community to gather and to celebrate its festivals and events. It needs an outdoor public space that would accommodate the many civic functions and annual events that take place in Olney. Currently, they are held in parking lots or playgrounds. Ideally, the public space should be located as part of a mixed-use civic center project to function as the town commons.

The Town Center lacks a strong visual identity. Even though some structures provide a variety in building types and architectural styles, its character is mostly defined by strip shopping centers and other commercial establishments along the two State highways. The views from the main roads are generally dominated by parking lots. The physical form of the Town Center is too scattered and needs an identifiable physical feature such as a compact building pattern, unique landscaping, or pedestrian oriented streets with special character that would help create a sense of place.

## **PROPOSED CONCEPT**

The Town Center Plan is guided by the concept of Olney as a satellite town that functions as a local retail center rather than a regional shopping and employment center. The Town Center is envisioned as a compact, low-scale, retail and service center containing a mix of commercial and residential uses in a variety of building types and sizes with safe and convenient pedestrian connections, public open spaces and other amenities. Georgia Avenue and MD 108 will continue to be the main thoroughfares and carry large volumes of local and through traffic, but landscaping, improved crosswalks, and urban design treatment will help manage the traffic and improve their character. Residential uses in the Town Center will be less dependent on cars for access to the Town Center, which may help reduce parking demand there. Stores that serve a regional rather than a local area should be prohibited since they would consume the area's traffic capacity, and land in the Town Center, that would otherwise support a greater number and variety of smaller stores in the Town Center. A major public open space with a civic center should provide a focal point and a place for the community's civic life.

A more compact development pattern is proposed to absorb additional development without increasing the overall land area of the Town Center and to transform the Town Center from its current linear setting to a more varied building form. A variety of building heights is encouraged to avoid the monotony of linear single-story shopping centers on major properties. New developments should be encouraged to have street facades (buildings located along or closer to sidewalks) and parking lots should be located in the back or side to create more attractive streetscape than parking lots as the dominant view in the Town Center.

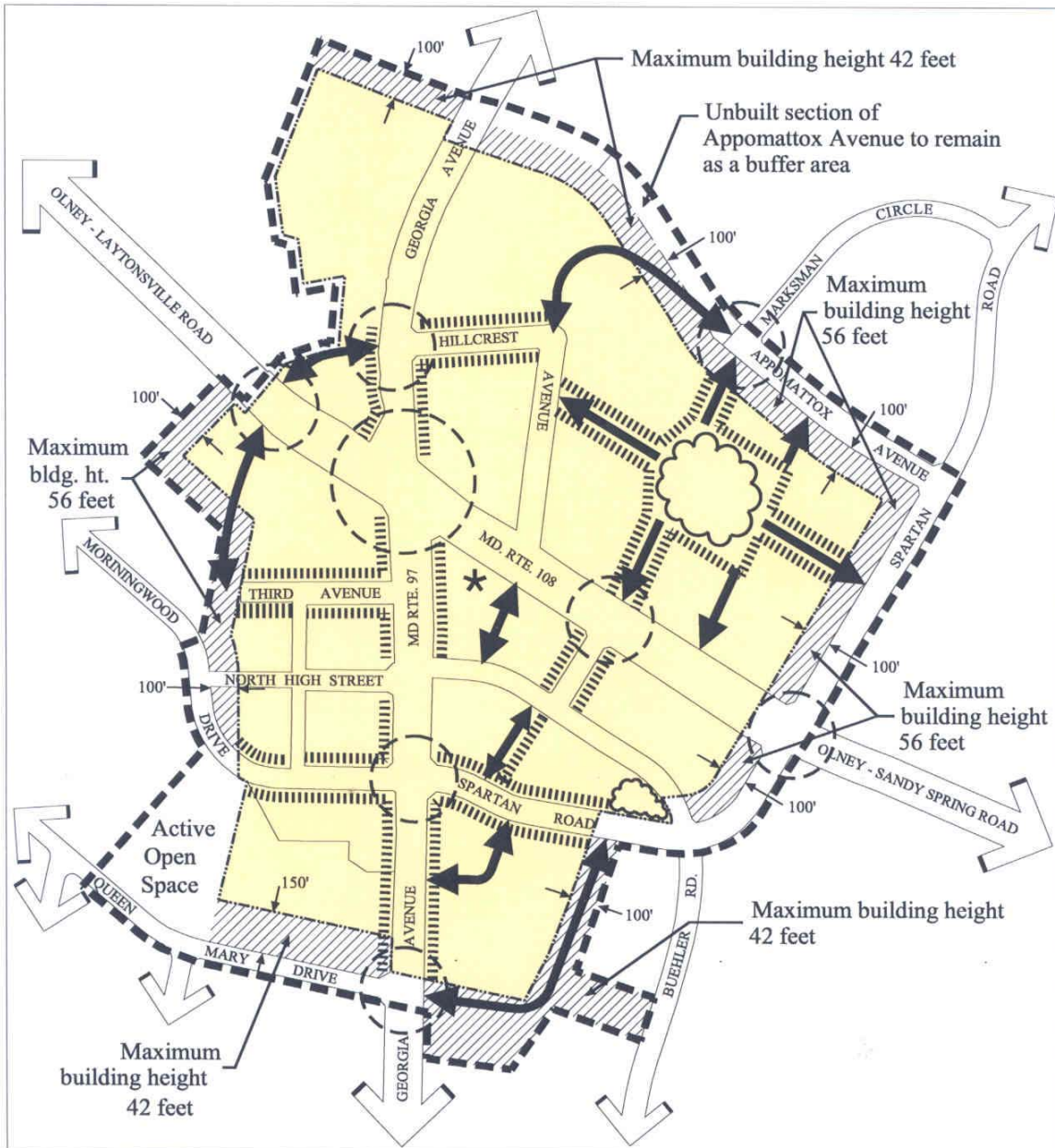
This vision cannot be achieved without additional growth in the Town Center. Since it is not feasible to accommodate a major redevelopment of the Town Center with surface parking within the current boundaries of the Town Center, the proposed concept is based on a more compact pattern of development with some structured parking on larger properties. Although the recommended zoning framework would allow a total maximum of more than 3.8 million square feet of commercial space and up to 2,000 residential units in the Town Center, not all properties would be able to achieve the maximum permitted density because of their size, configuration, access and other constraints, or their own program of

development. Possible redevelopments most likely to happen in the near future are the two shopping centers in the Northeast Quadrant, which have the greatest potential for including a civic center and a town commons; a new Safeway store on the Safeway property in the Southeast Quadrant; and some residential or mixed-use development on assemblage of properties in the vicinity of North High Street in the Southwest Quadrant. The Town Center could possibly have up to 500,000 square feet of additional commercial growth for a total of approximately 1.3 million square feet of commercial space and between 400 and 1,300 residential units in the next 20 years.

The proposed concept would be implemented through a combination of zoning mechanisms and design guidelines to shape the future redevelopment of the Town Center. It is designed to be flexible enough to address future variations and opportunities. Sites may not be developed exactly as expected, not developed at all for a long time, or changes in ownership patterns may create unforeseen opportunities. The concept has four major elements:

1. Mixed Land Use;
2. A Civic Center and a Town Commons;
3. Pedestrian Circulation; and
4. Urban Design Controls

# Town Center Concept



- Town center boundary
- ⋯ High priority pedestrian crossings
- Core area - max. bldg. ht. - 70'
- ▨ Edge area - max. bldg. ht. - 42' to 56'
- ★ Existing Olney House (Historic)
- ☼ Public open space exact size, location and configuration to be determined at site plan
- ▤ Recommended street facade, locations shown for illustrative purposes
- ↔ Vehicular/ pedestrian connection-exact location and configuration to be determined at site plan

## **MIXED LAND USE**

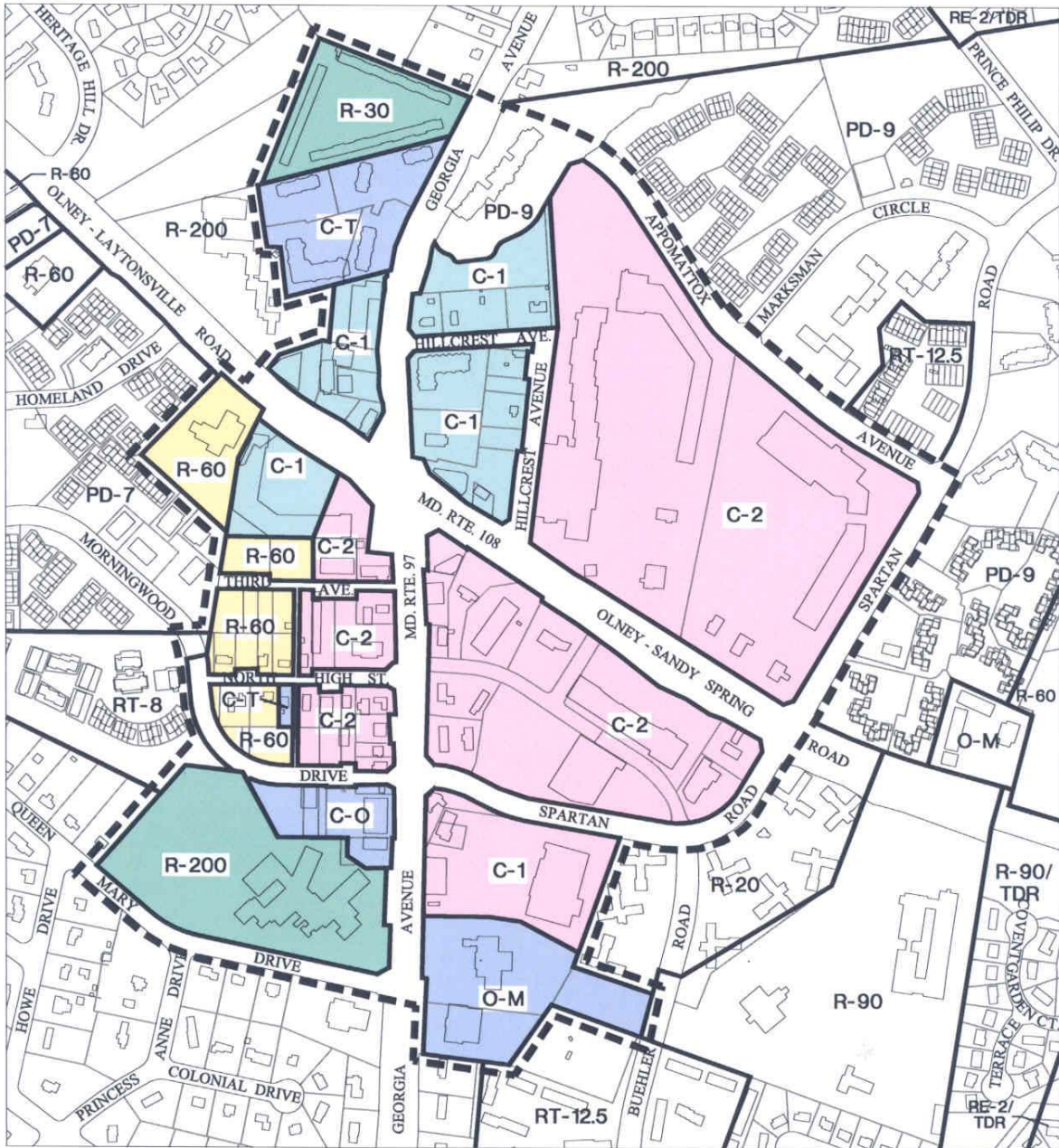
A mix of commercial and residential uses in the Town Center is a major element of the proposed concept. Mixed-use developments would increase the number of people within easy walking distance of stores and services in the Town Center, decrease parking needs for some of the uses, and create a larger customer base for local businesses without changing the concept of Olney Town Center as a place for local retail and services. Mixed use buildings with more than one floor would also help break the linear monotony of the single-story shopping centers surrounded by large parking lots. Developments along the edges of the Town Center should have residential buildings or uses compatible with the adjoining residential development. Ground floor of all new developments in the core should preferably have retail uses where appropriate while the upper floors can be residential, offices or other uses. Appropriate open spaces should be provided for the residential components of the mixed-use projects.

The existing five different commercial zoning districts, C-1, C-2, C-T, C-O, and O-M, do not provide for mixed-use developments and they are not appropriate tools to achieve the proposed concept of a compact, traditional town center with building facades located along sidewalks and public spaces. A new set of zoning controls should be implemented in the Town Center to help achieve the proposed concept. All properties in the Town Center should be rezoned to that mixed-use zone. The new zone should be designed to produce public amenities including space for a civic center and a major outdoor public space. The new zone should encourage building frontage to frame the streets and public open spaces in appropriate locations through street facade requirements and minimal front building setback controls discussed in more detail in the Urban Design section of this chapter. Density is limited to 0.35 floor area ratio (FAR) and 8 units to the acre under the standard method and 1.0 FAR and 20 units to the acre under the optional method. The ability to obtain full residential density under the optional method should be based on compatibility with surrounding development and staying within the height limits in this Master Plan.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Encourage development of residential uses in the Town Center.**
- 2. Rezone all properties in the Town Center with a single, mixed-use zone.**
- 3. Allow up to 20 residential units per acre under the optional method only if it can be accommodated within the height limits in the Plan and without compromising compatibility with surrounding uses.**

# Town Center Existing Zoning

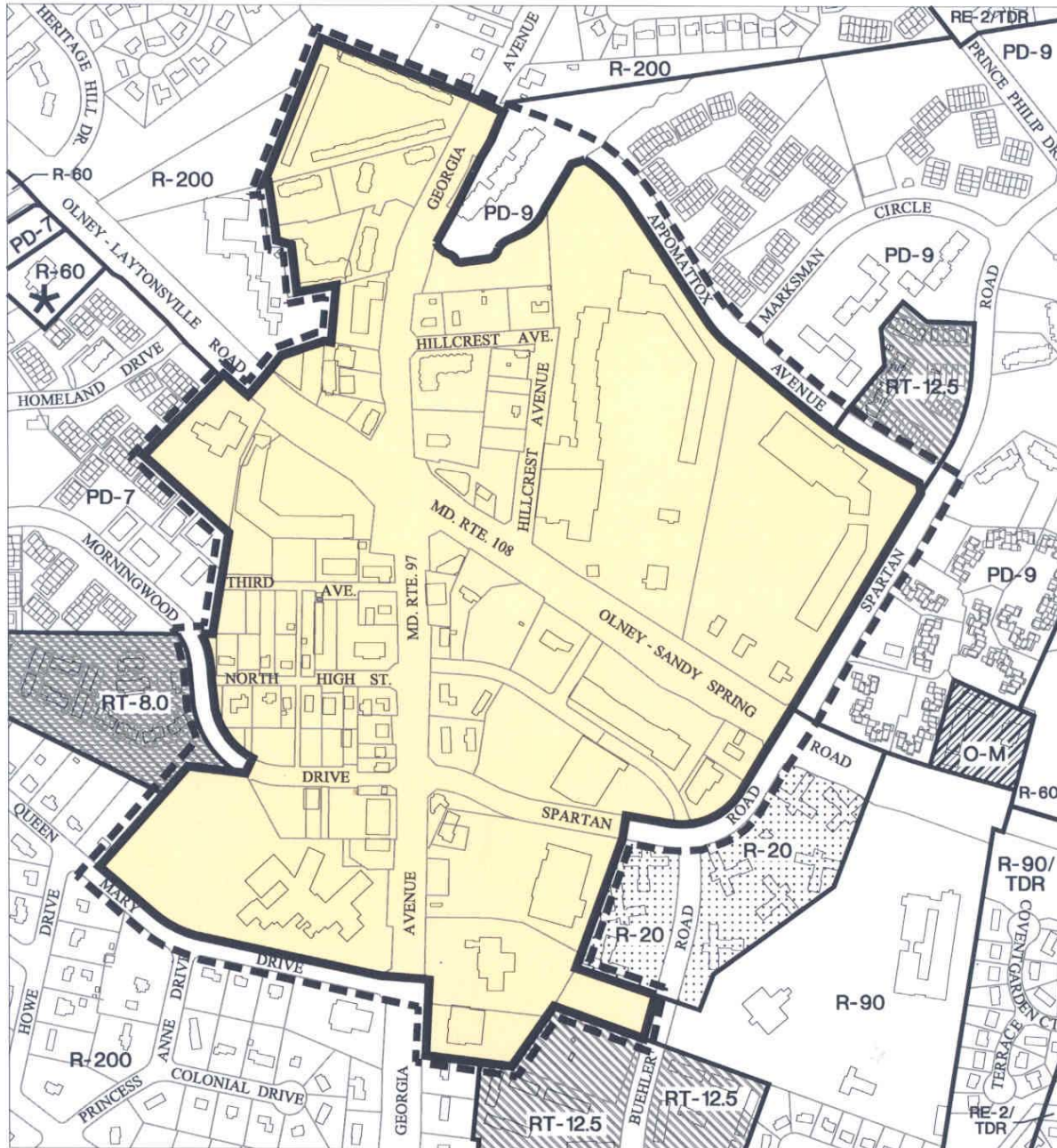


--- TOWN CENTER BOUNDARY



0 600'

# Town Center Proposed Zoning



- TOWN CENTER BOUNDARY
- EXISTING ZONING BOUNDARY
- \* SUITABLE FOR PD-7
- PROPOSED NEW MIXED USE ZONE - MXTC





## **CIVIC CENTER AND TOWN COMMONS**

Olney Town Center needs a major public open space that would serve as town commons, and it needs a civic center that would house the various public services currently located in and around the Town Center. In the best possible scenario, these two functions should be located next to each other, preferably surrounded by, or adjacent to, other retail or mixed-use developments within the Town Center. The town commons would provide an appropriate setting for the civic center functions, provide a focal point for the whole area, and help create a sense of place for the Town Center. Although an open space of approximately one acre would be the appropriate size for a town commons, smaller public spaces should also be provided throughout the Town Center as redevelopment opportunities arise.

Since there are no publicly owned vacant sites large enough to accommodate a joint civic center/town commons project within the Town Center, the feasibility of a civic center and town commons, either as a zoning amenity through the redevelopment of one of the major properties, or a public/private partnership, should be explored. Opportunities for a joint development or a property swap should also be pursued at the time of redevelopment of any of the shopping centers, especially the 30-acre Freeman property with two shopping centers, to achieve a civic center and a town commons. In addition to a major public open space, an indoor civic center could be an amenity, one of the many types of public spaces allowed under the public use space requirements. Any such interior public amenity should be considered as the public use space and not included in the maximum permitted floor area calculation of the project.

The zoning incentive mechanism is only one way to achieve this goal. Other opportunities and mechanisms, including but not limited to, land swaps of public properties, a public/private partnership for joint development of a civic center on private property, or public acquisition of private property through dedication or purchase, should also be explored and pursued. The 2.5-acre Olney Library site could possibly be used for a civic center if developed in conjunction with the adjoining Olney Shopping Center redevelopment. The post office site, although not ideally located, could be used as a potential site for some of the uses in a civic center that do not have to be in the Town Center.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Create a civic center with a major public open space of approximately one acre in the Town Center through a variety of public/private partnership mechanisms, including dedication or County acquisition of private property, land exchange, or incentive zoning.**
- 2. The major public space should be prominently located, accessible from an existing major street or a new main street, and designed to accommodate a variety of functions including place for public gathering and events.**

## **PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION**

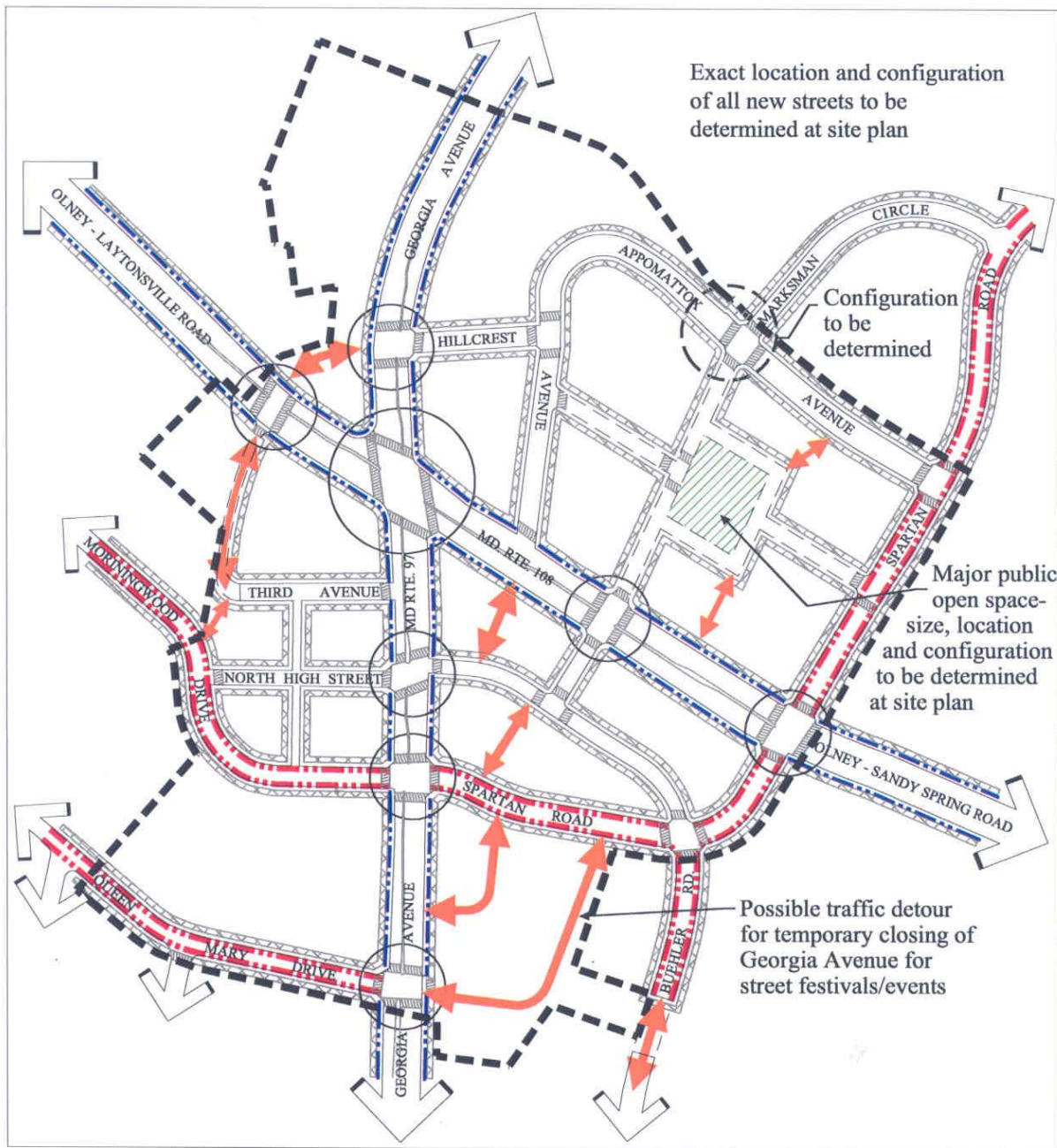
The Olney Town Center has a car-oriented development pattern typical of strip shopping centers. It needs an improved network of streets and sidewalks with short blocks and direct pedestrian connections among stores and different parts of the center. More specifically, in the Southwest Quadrant, North High Street should be connected to Morningwood Drive to connect the Town Center to the adjoining residential communities, and Third Avenue should be connected to MD 108 via the Olney Shopping Center property at the corner of Georgia Avenue and MD 108, if possible, through redevelopment of those properties. In the Northeast Quadrant, the two shopping centers should include one or more vehicular and pedestrian connection between the two centers, and provide other internal connections and walkways with direct connections to the surrounding residential community. Similarly, in the Southeast Quadrant, large blocks should be broken up with through-block pedestrian walkways, as well as vehicular driveways where feasible. Other opportunities to create more pedestrian connections should be pursued as redevelopment occurs in the future.

Any future street improvements, especially Georgia Avenue and MD 108, should be carefully designed to incorporate features that help reduce speeds and improve pedestrian safety. Lower speed limits, reduced pavement widths, curbside tree panels, on-street parking, and other design treatments should be used to create a visual environment that discourages speeding through the Town Center.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Provide easy and convenient multiple pedestrian connections between the shopping centers and the adjoining residential areas.**
- 2. Create multiple, safe and pedestrian-oriented crossings of Georgia Avenue and MD 108.**
- 3. Connect North High Street to Morningwood Drive. Connect MD 108 to Third Avenue, if feasible, at the time of redevelopment of the Olney Library and the Olney Shopping Center.**
- 4. Allow on-street parking on all streets except Georgia Avenue and MD 108.**
- 5. Create pedestrian-oriented streetscape through landscaping, traffic calming measures and other design features.**

# Town Center Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation Concept



- Town Center Boundary
- ↔ Pedestrian/ Vehicular Connection
- ⊕ Crosswalk
- High Priority Pedestrian Crossings

- ▬ Sidewalk/ Bike Path/ Vehicular
- ▬ Shared Use Bike Path (off-road)
- ▬ Shared Roadway Bike Path



## URBAN DESIGN

The Town Center concept is based on a more compact development pattern than exists today. A variety of building heights is encouraged to avoid the monotony of linear, single-story shopping centers. Buildings along Georgia Avenue and MD 108 should be higher than elsewhere in the Center and located closer to the street to discourage large expanses of parking lots as the predominant view from these roads. Buildings located in the core area of the Town Center can be as high as 70 feet. Buildings along the edges of the Town Center can be up to 56 feet high depending upon the height of the existing building in the adjoining residential area. Appropriate transition in building heights should be provided to ensure compatibility between new developments in the Town Center and the adjacent communities. In addition, commercial and residential uses should be sited to maximize compatibility with adjacent residential developments.

New developments in the Town Center should be encouraged to create a main street character by locating building fronts at or close to the sidewalk instead of requiring them to set back from the right-of-way line. The new Mixed-Use zone should require front building walls (street facades) to be located at the right-of-way line with no required minimum front setback for a certain minimum percentage of the lot frontage. Street facades should have appropriate massing and relationship of building height to street width, as well as buildings entrances and storefronts to enliven streetscape with pedestrian activity. The Town Center Concept figure provides guidance about which streets are more desirable than others to have a main street character, and therefore more appropriate for street facades. However, topographic and other site conditions as well as location of open spaces may preclude all building fronts to be located along sidewalks on every property, especially those with more than one lot frontage. The Planning Board should have the flexibility to determine the need and extent of necessary adjustments to these guidelines based on a site's unique conditions and functional requirements during the site plan review.

A "Green Town Center" is envisioned for Olney. Generous landscaping and reforestation should be provided in the Town Center for aesthetic as well as environmental reasons. Trees and landscaping can help create a distinct identity that the Town Center now lacks. Special attention should be given to parking lots, which should be required to provide and retain large shade trees and plantings to soften the visual impact of hard surfaces. Forest conservation law requirements should preferably be addressed through new tree or forest planting within the Town Center. This will encourage the greening of the Town Center over time. It is important that any redevelopment in the Town Center incorporate appropriate stormwater management measures that complement restoration action plans and improve conditions in Upper Rock Creek and the Hawlings River.

Georgia Avenue and MD 108 define the character of the Town Center more than any other street or property. They carry a large volume of local and through traffic and will continue to do so. These two thoroughfares should be designed as urban boulevards and their current traffic capacity should not be increased by adding through travel lanes. The negative impacts of through traffic should be mitigated through landscaping such as green medians, street trees, sidewalks, at least six-foot wide curbside green panels, and other design features.

In addition to the minimum one-acre open space recommended for the town commons, the proposed concept envisions other, smaller open spaces through redevelopment of properties that would be able to use the optional method development mechanism of the new zone. Public open space may not be desirable on every lot due to its location, size and configuration. Development on larger and more regularly shaped properties would be better able to provide plazas, gardens and other separately delineated public spaces in appropriate places. Smaller lots may be allowed to satisfy all of the public use space requirements through green areas, landscaping, sidewalk widening and other amenities if their location and size would not be adequate to set aside area for a public open space. The Planning Board at the time of site plan review should analyze the need and desirability of an outdoor public space on a particular lot in terms of its size, location, type, configuration and relationship to the street and adjoining developments, and determine whether a public open space is in fact needed and more desirable than streetscape or landscape improvements.

Some structured parking would be needed to meet the needs of the overall growth proposed for the Town Center. Parking garages should be carefully designed to fit in with the topography and become a part of the visual fabric of the Town Center. They should be safe, well lighted, and appropriately located for pedestrian access and to achieve compatibility with existing and proposed residential development. In addition, they should be incorporated into the main building, where feasible, instead of stand-alone structures.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Limit the height of any building within the core area of the Town Center to 70 feet. Buildings along the edges of the Town Center should be 42 to 56 feet high to be compatible with the adjoining residential development. In no event should the height of buildings adjacent to existing residentially zoned land exceed 56 feet. Unoccupied features such as clock towers and spires may be higher than the maximum permitted building heights.**
- 2. Front building facades should be located along sidewalks and public open spaces. Ground floor of all buildings along major streets, and specifically along streets with recommended street facades, should have uses that generate pedestrian traffic, such as retail, restaurants, professional offices and services.**
- 3. Wider sidewalks with sidewalk cafes and landscape amenities should be provided as part of public use spaces in appropriate locations.**
- 4. Public open spaces on adjoining lots should be located and designed to function as one space to avoid fragmentation of these amenities.**
- 5. Larger stores (with a footprint of more than 20,000 square feet) should be carefully designed to make sure that they are integrated into the streetscape and do not create blank walls or loading docks along streets meant for pedestrian activity and street facades.**

- 6. Create a “main street” on the Freeman property with connections to Hillcrest Avenue, Appomattox Avenue and MD 108, with retail on the ground floor and frontage on a major public open space. Continue this main street across MD 108 into the Southeast Quadrant of the Town Center with any redevelopment of the properties in that quadrant.**
- 7. Avoid “canyon effect” on narrow streets by using building setbacks above second or third story, cornice lines, varying facade heights, or other design techniques to achieve visually pleasing scale and relationship between building height and streets/open spaces.**
- 8. Pedestrian ingress, egress and interior walkways should be raised or separated from parking areas through change of materials, curbs, railings, grass panels or other design features.**
- 9. Provide benches, landscaping, light fixtures, trash receptacles, and other amenities in public spaces.**
- 10. Create visual breaks in larger parking lots through plantings and walkways.**
- 11. Encourage any redevelopment in the portion of the Town Center that drains to the Hawlings River to incorporate extraordinary stormwater management features that contribute to the restoration of the James Creek and Upper Olney Mill tributaries.**
- 12. Stormwater management techniques should include measures to improve the efficiency of existing down stream facilities and protect remaining streams in the Town Center.**
- 13. Accommodate forest conservation requirements on-site, where possible, to assist in greening the Town Center.**